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# THE BOOK OF ESTHER IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORY

BY JACOB HOSCHANDER, Dropsie College.

## CHAPTER V

The term 'Judeans'—The renaissance of Israel's religion—National aspirations—The religious propaganda among the exiles—Religious creeds and the conduct of their adherents—The hatred of the Babylonian exiles towards Babylonia—The attitude of the Judeans in Egypt towards this country—The conduct of the wealthy Judeans in Babylonia—The cause of persecutions—The Judeans' attitude towards the Persians—Zoroaster's 'monotheistic' religion—The characters of Mordecai and Esther—The two opposing tendencies within Judaism—Mordecai versus Ezra and Nehemiah—The effect of the religious persecutions—The predicament of the Sopherim—The omission of all religious elements in the Book of Esther—The attitude of the Rabbis towards this book—The omission of the names of Mordecai and Esther in Sirach's *Fathers of the World*.

IN the preceding chapter we have demonstrated that the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther is to be identified with Artaxerxes II. Now it remains to prove that the main event of our story actually occurred under that king's reign. Before, however, proceeding to deal with that event, it is indispensable to outline the conditions and the character of the Jews during the Babylonian captivity and the Persian period; for the misinterpretation of the Book of Esther in ancient and modern times is mainly due to misconception on those points. In the first place we have to investigate the term 'Jews' (יהודים).

In pre-exilic times, the inhabitants of the kingdom of Judea, irrespective of their descent, had been termed 'Jews'

(יהורים).<sup>1</sup> Even those who were worshippers of Baal, Moloch, or Astarte, who were the citizens of that country, were nevertheless called 'Jews'. This appellation was used without the least regard to their beliefs. The practice of idolatry did not deprive any one of his nationality. On the other hand, Gentiles who had adopted the religion of Jahveh, but had not become inhabitants of Judea, were, of course, not called 'Jews' (יהורים), and still remained members of their own nationality.<sup>2</sup> Thus the term 'Jews' had not the least religious significance.

What were the criteria of the Judean nationality of the inhabitants of Judea who had been carried into the Babylonian captivity, or had migrated to Egypt? The Hebrew language<sup>3</sup> and the national consciousness! But

<sup>1</sup> The term יהורים (2 Kings 16. 6; 25. 25; Jer. 32. 12, &c.), includes all inhabitants of Judea, even those who did not belong to the tribe of Judah (cf. Ges.-Buhl's *Hwb.*, p. 311).

<sup>2</sup> It goes without saying that the worship of Jahveh, as generally practised by the people in the pre-exilic period, was not restricted to the state of Judea, and thus was not characteristic of the inhabitants of this country. There were the inhabitants of Samaria who claimed to be worshippers of Jahveh (Ezra 4. 2). The name *Jaū-bi'di* of the king of Hamath points to the existence of that worship in the latter country. In this fact we may see a corroboration of the reading *Jōram*, the name of the son of the king of Hamath (2 Sam. 8. 10), of which we find the variant *Hadōram* (1 Chron. 26. 25). The name *Asri-jau* of the king of *Ja'udi* (cf. Winckler, *Altorientalische Forschungen*, I, 'Das Syrische Land Jaudi und der angebliche Azarja von Juda') leaves no doubt that the Jahveh-worship existed in the latter country. But we may wonder whether it is a mere coincidence that the name of that country is identical with that of Judea, in the cuneiform inscriptions, and that in both countries the Jahveh-worship is found. Who knows whether there is not after all some ethnological connexion between these two countries. For the legal status of foreigners among the Jews cf. Ed. Meyer's *Entstehung des Judenthums*, pp. 227-34.

<sup>3</sup> Hebrew was still the national tongue, as in the period of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18. 26), and had not yet been superseded by Aramaic, as we may learn from the words of Ezekiel: 'For thou art not sent to a people of

on a foreign soil these distinctive marks could not have endured for a long period. The succeeding generations, born in those countries, could not but adopt the idiom of the population among whom they were dwelling, with whom they were in intercourse. Their own national tongue was scarcely of any use in their daily pursuits, and this fact must have been detrimental to its preservation. Nor could the national consciousness of those generations survive for a long space of time. Gradually it must have evaporated. There was nothing that should have prevented the descendants of those captives or immigrants from being absorbed in the nations among whom they dwelt. Their assimilation with the latter seemed to have been inevitable.

The complete disappearance of the remnant of Israel was averted by the *renascence* of the Religion of Israel. The religious ideas, propagated by the prophets of the captivity and a small number of zealous Jews, made rapid progress, not only among their own fellow captives of Judea, but also among Gentiles. The result of that religious movement apparently was the preservation of the Jewish nationality. But as a matter of fact, a new principle was now being proclaimed. This did not result in *restoration*, but in *reform* of the Jewish nationality. Henceforth, neither descent, nor language, but religion, was the criterion of 'Jews'. However, the religion the exilic prophets resurrected could not be restricted to the narrow bounds of the Jewish nationality. The national barrier had to be removed, and every one was invited to a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel' (Ezek. 3. 5). Even after the return from the captivity, Hebrew continued to be the common language, as we may adduce from the words of Nehemiah (13. 24), that the offspring of those who married non-Jewish wives could not speak the Jews' language.

enter into this religious union and was gladly received. Those who accepted this invitation, and entered into the Covenant of Israel, became at the same time 'Jews' (יהודים). Consequently, the Jewish nationality disappeared from the scene, and its place was taken by the Jewish religious community.<sup>4</sup> The latter included, on the one hand, all adherents of the Jewish religion, even Gentiles, and, on the other hand, excluded all idolaters, even those who belonged to the Jewish race.<sup>5</sup>

There were, indeed, Jewish patriots who thought differently. They saw in the religious movement an effective force for the Jewish national resurrection, whose preservation could be effected only on a racial basis. These claims could not but deeply hurt the feelings of the newly-converted Gentile, who bitterly complained: 'The Lord hath utterly separated me from His people'.<sup>6</sup> But those national aspirations were nipped in the bud by the great

<sup>4</sup> Ed. Meyer (*Gesch. d. Alt.*, III, p. 183) arrives at the same conclusion, but from a point of view which the present writer does not share, in observing: 'The community is no longer national, but had become a religious association which makes propaganda and enlists adherents among foreign tribes.' Cf. also his *Entstehung d. Jud.*, p. 233 f. He points to the large number of proselytes in the Greek and Roman periods. The Semites of the Western countries, who were captives like the Jews, may have associated with the latter rather than with the Babylonians, and thus were easily persuaded to embrace their creed.

<sup>5</sup> We shall see further below that the latter were designated as בני נכר 'sons of the stranger'.

<sup>6</sup> Isa. 56. 3. There must have been a national party which was dissatisfied with Ezekiel's declaration, that the proselytes should become equal citizens in the land restored to Israel, who said: 'And it shall come to pass that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel. They shall have inheritance among you among the tribes of Israel' (Ezek. 47. 22).

exilic prophet, the so-called 'Second Isaiah', who proclaimed: 'Also the sons of the stranger which join themselves to the Lord to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one who keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant. Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people'.<sup>7</sup> In accordance with this principle, Jewish nationality receded into the background, and the religion became its postulate. The idea of Jewish nationality required adherence to the Jewish religion, not, however, *vice versa*. Idolaters of Jewish descent ceased to be 'Jews', and Syrians, Babylonians, &c., who accepted the Jewish religion, became at the same time 'Jews' (יהודים). The latter term lost its gentilic significance and became a religious designation. In post-exilic times, the pagans who lived among the Jewish people in Judea, though inhabitants of this country, were never termed 'Jehūdīm'. The truth of this definition was felt by the Rabbis, who expressed this idea in observing, 'Everybody who denies idolatry is called a Jew' (יהודי),<sup>8</sup> and further assert that the

<sup>7</sup> Isa. 56. 6, 7. This prophet went still further than Ezekiel. To him it is irrelevant whether the stranger who worshipped Jahveh lived among the Jews or in his own country. The house of God is the common property of all nations, and everybody is made welcome here. There is only this difference between Jews and Gentiles; the former are condemned for forsaking the God of their ancestors, while no blame is attached to the latter, if they refuse to join the Lord and adhere to their ancestral deities.

<sup>8</sup> Talmud Babli Megillah 13a: כָּל הַכּוֹפֵר בַּעֲבוּרָה זֶרֶה נִקְרָא יְהוּדִי. The Talmudic expression, however, is misleading. A gentile denying the divinity of idols and refusing to worship them does not become thereby a 'Jew'. The Talmud of course means that every Israelite who refuses

biblical commandment, 'This is the ordinance of the pass-over: There shall no stranger eat thereof', exclusively refers to a Jewish idolater.<sup>9</sup> The latter is thus, notwithstanding his Jewish descent, termed 'the son of a stranger' (בן נכר), according to the Rabbinic conception. The same term which is used by Ezekiel, 'Thus saith the Lord God: no stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel',<sup>10</sup> may have the same meaning. We see, then, that the appellation 'Jews' (יהודים) in the exilic and post-exilic periods was a purely religious designation,<sup>11</sup> and not a national term, like 'Nazarenes' for 'Christians' in the Middle Ages. It is of interest to notice that יהודי is the only gentilic noun from which a verbal noun, מתייהדים 'becoming Jews', is derived, but we nowhere meet with a similar derivation from other gentilic nouns, as אדומי 'Edomite', ארמי 'Aramean', יוני 'Greek', מצרי 'Egyptian', &c. The author of the Book of Esther who to recognize idols, even a descendant of any other tribe and not of Judah, is nevertheless called a 'Judean'. The same is of course true of proselytes.

<sup>9</sup> See Rashi on Exod. 12. 44.

<sup>10</sup> Ezek. 44. 9. In the following passages the prophet excepts the Levites, though they had been idolaters. Thus the former passage seems to refer to Israelites, not to utter strangers.

<sup>11</sup> Cassel, *l. c.*, p. 40, is the only commentator who correctly perceived that יהודים in Esther is a distinctly religious, not a national, term. But he was wrong in believing that the name 'Israel' remained the ideal designation characteristic of the relation of God to Israel. On the contrary, the term 'Israel' has a purely national signification, including even those who are not 'sons of the covenant' (בני ברית), according to the Rabbis, and as can be seen from the term פושעי ישראל. It is of interest to see how the modern commentators contradict themselves. They generally see in יהודים a national term (cf. Siegfried, p. 141 and others), and nevertheless almost all of them entertain no doubt that the story of Esther reflects the events of the Maccabean period, though these events had a purely religious character.

used that derivation knew that the appellation *Jehūdī* was a religious term.<sup>12</sup>

The words of the Babylonian Isaiah, quoted above, indicate that the promoters of the religious movement did not content themselves with the conversion of their own brethren, but became aggressive, and carried their religious ideas into the camps of the Gentiles. The religious propaganda, carried on successfully, produced the same change of conception concerning the term 'Jews' among Gentiles as among the Jews themselves. Seeing people of non-Jewish descent embracing the Jewish religion, the Gentiles used the term 'Jews' in a religious sense. This neither implied that an adherent of the Jewish religion was of foreign descent, nor that the family of such a one belonged to the same creed, which was an individual belief, regardless of family, race, and country.

What reason may we advance for the great success of that religious revival among the Judean exiles? Did the latter attribute their great miseries, the loss of their country and of their freedom, to their evil conduct and transgressions against the God of their ancestors? This may have been the case with a small fraction of the exiles. But if we should judge the reasoning of the average of the Judeans by the behaviour of their brethren in Egypt,<sup>13</sup> we would be forced to the conclusion that the sufferings they experienced produced just the opposite effect, inducing them to believe that their misfortune was due to the wrath of the gods whose worship they neglected.<sup>14</sup> Shall we

<sup>12</sup> For the author's statement that many embraced Judaism, see the discussion of that subject in chapter IX.

<sup>13</sup> Jer. 44. 16-19.

<sup>14</sup> Ed. Meyer (*G. A.*, III, p. 177) assumes that the Babylonian Jews



ascribe that success to the eloquence of the exilic prophets, and the lofty ideas of religion and morality they proclaimed? In their former country the Judeans had prophets whose eloquence and religious ideas were by no means inferior to those of the captivity, and yet they were not persuaded by their arguments and exhortations.<sup>15</sup>

The average man hardly ever judges religious creeds on their own merits, but by the conduct and deeds of their adherents. In their actions and behaviour he sees the

thought differently from their own brethren in Egypt. This is correct, as we shall further see. But he ought to have been more explicit and inform us of the reason why they did think differently.

<sup>15</sup> This question is hardly touched upon by Ed. Meyer, *l.c.* He sees in the exiled Jews strict adherents to the Jahvistic religion, with the exception of a few who were soon lost among the gentiles, and does not give credence to the accusation of Ezekiel that they were idolaters, considering chapters XIV and XX mere fiction. This historical conception is decidedly erroneous. There is no denying the fact that the Jews who remained in Judea continued to be idolaters, notwithstanding the introduction of the Law by Josiah. For this fact we have the testimony of the eye-witness Jeremiah (19, 25, 32, 33, &c.). Those who were carried into captivity could not have been different from those who were left behind. Nebuchadnezzar did not select religious Jews as captives. Those who were carried away belonged to the partisans of Egypt, and there is no reason why they should have been more religious than the others. As to the chapters dealing with the idolatry of the Jews being fictitious, such an assertion is rather daring. The prophets frequently made predictions which did not come true. But none of them would have dared to make accusations which were not true. Ezekiel wrote his book for his contemporaries, not for modern historians. If he had accused them of sins they did not commit, the prophet would have lost his reputation for veracity and discredited all his prophecies. Ed. Meyer seems to have overlooked to whom the prophet addressed himself in those chapters, not to the common people, but to 'the Elders of Israel'. Most of the common people abandoned idols not long after their arrival at Babylon, but not the wealthy classes, as we shall see further on. Renan (*History of the People of Israel*, VII, 1) does not explain how the *anavim*, 'the pietists, the fanatics', became prominent in Israel. Nor does Graetz, in his *History*, I, p. 332, though his description of the exiles is partly correct.

influence of their religions. Therefore, just and benevolent intercourse of members of a religious creed with their fellow-men will help more towards disseminating their belief than the highest code of ethics. On the other hand, unfair and malicious dealings of members of any creed will do more towards discrediting the latter than the worst ethical conceptions. A people, as a rule, is favourably inclined towards the religion of its friends, and is easily persuaded to follow their example, but detests that of its enemies, without investigating which of the two religions is of higher quality. This may be the reason why the Israelites, during the period of the Judges, were willing to imitate the idolatrous worship of their friendly neighbours, but always turned back to the God of their ancestors when oppressed by them.<sup>16</sup> This repentance may have been a purely psychological process, and not the effect of religious convictions. The modern scholars who contend that the Mosaic Code contains numerous Babylonian rites and myths, taken over in the exilic period, leave out of consideration the character of the Jews. The latter have been living among Christian nations for the last sixteen hundred years. And yet we do not find any rite or custom the Jews adopted from their Christian neighbours during this long period. This remarkable phenomenon is by no means due to the rigidity of the Jewish religion. In modern times, in liberal countries, where Jews are treated more or less fairly, many have abandoned ritual laws of the Bible and Talmud, and have even adopted Christian customs. The Spanish Jewish preachers, six hundred years ago, who considered the stories of Genesis pure mythology, and saw in the Patriarchs and the Twelve Tribes personifications

<sup>16</sup> See Judges 3-13.

of the planets and the signs of the Zodiac,<sup>17</sup> were quite capable of changing the Jewish religion in the most radical manner, but for the persecutions the Christians continually inflicted upon the Jews. In paraphrasing a Talmudic saying, we may venture the paradoxical statement: The Christians did more for the preservation of the Jewish religion by their persecutions, than did the Prophets and the Talmudic literature.<sup>18</sup> The same, of course, holds true of the Mohammedans. The Bible undoubtedly contains many ideas similar to or identical with those of the Babylonians. If they originated in Babylonia, they must have been transmitted to the Jews in a very early period,<sup>19</sup> not at a time when the Jews suffered under the heavy yoke of that empire.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See the Responses of ("ש"ב"א") ר' אדרת בן אדרת, No. 415.

<sup>18</sup> The Talmud observes: 'The seal-ring which Ahasuerus gave to Haman effected a greater success than the forty-eight prophets who rose in Israel: it did what none of them was able to do, to cause them to repent of their sins', Megillah 12 b.

<sup>19</sup> In the present writer's opinion, the transmission to Israel of ideas developed in the Euphrates Valley dates back to a pre-Mosaic period (cf. *Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, vol. I, pp. 147 ff.). Of the same opinion is also Jastrow, in his recent work, *Hebrew and Babylonian Traditions*, New York, 1914, p. 4. Albert T. Clay takes a different position, in his work *Amurru*, Philadelphia, 1909, and contends that the Babylonian religious conceptions developed mainly in the Westland, the home of Israel.

<sup>20</sup> Renan (*History*, VI, 1) remarks: 'It is our opinion that the *pious* Jews who were captives in Babylonia willfully closed their eyes to all that surrounded them, like Bretons transplanted to Paris who will not look at anything and depreciate all that passes under their eyes.' The analogy is rather incorrect. Paris did not destroy Bretagne, and thus the Bretons have no reason to detest the former city, and merely look down contemptuously upon this state of luxury. The Judeans, however, had ample reason to abominate Babylonia, even those who were not pious. Jastrow, in the work cited above (see preceding note), correctly observes that the Hebrews were in no mood to assimilate ideas from those who appeared to them in the light of ruthless destroyers.

The Judeans led into captivity to Babylonia naturally hated intensely the people which had deprived them of their liberty. Their conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar, was by no means a cruel monarch. He was a generous robber, and had no desire to destroy his victims utterly. Though depriving the exiles of their possessions and their freedom, he gave them means of subsistence in his native land. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, seeing in this king the instrument of Jahveh's judgement, were grateful to him for his gentle treatment of the exiles, and even represented him as the 'servant of Jahveh'. But the victims themselves thought differently on this point. Little did they care whether he was an instrument in the hand of Jahveh for the execution of his judgement. They saw in him only the merciless destroyer of their happiness, and thus detested and cursed this king, his country, his people, and all their institutions.

The exiles were addicted to idolatrous practices in their own country. Their local gods having, according to the common conceptions,<sup>21</sup> no power outside of their own

<sup>21</sup> Such a conception was generally shared by Jews and Gentiles alike. David complained to Saul: 'They have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying: Go, serve other gods' (1 Sam. 26. 19). The colonists transplanted by the Assyrians to Palestine found that their own gods were powerless to protect them against the lions, until they placed themselves under the protection of Jahveh, and only then were able to worship their ancestral gods, who became now the manifestations and ministers of Jahveh, 'they feared the Lord and served their own gods' (2 Kings 17. 25-33). The Assyrians frequently carried their captives and their gods to Assyria, for the purpose of depriving the latter of their power to avenge the harm done to their votaries. In Assyria the foreign gods became subject to the will of the indigenous gods, and had to punish their own votaries if they were not faithful to their masters. The Bible expresses the same idea: 'The Lord shall bring thee . . . unto a nation which neither thou nor thy father have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone' (Deut. 28. 36). Jahveh, having no representation, could

dominions, were of no use to them in a foreign country. The same conception prevailed even among those who were worshippers of Jahveh, that He was powerless to assist His votaries outside of Palestine. Now the Baalim and Astartes they had worshipped were essentially and by origin identical with many gods of the Euphrates valley, and the exiles could easily have substituted the latter for the former deities. And even the worship of Jahveh could have been preserved on this foreign soil by identifying him with one of the chief Babylonian divinities of West Semitic origin, like Adad or Marduk. But how could they be expected to recognize the very gods to whom their mortal enemies attributed the victory over them? It was quite natural that the captives who could not reconcile themselves to the new conditions, and deeply felt the misery of the captivity, detested and refused to worship the gods of their conquerors.<sup>22</sup> Not being able to preserve their old religious practices, and not willing to put themselves under the protection of the gods of their enemies, the captives were practically without any religion. There was a void in their heart, and they felt themselves forsaken by god and man.

Under those circumstances, the prophets found it easy to disseminate the old religion of Israel, as the soil was well prepared. The religion whose laws awakened memories

not be carried into captivity, and his worshippers would have to serve there other gods. It was due to the prophetic idea of the Omnipresence of Jahveh that the Jewish belief lost its local character, and could be established everywhere. Nevertheless, the idea of *Galuth ha-Shekinah*, that the Lord abides with his people in the captivity and is powerless to redeem them, has still survived in the Talmudic and Cabbalistic literature. It would lead us too far to dwell upon it.

<sup>22</sup> Renan, *l.c.*, failed to see that the idolatrous Jews had more reason to detest Babylonia than those who were pious. The latter may have seen in their miseries the hand of the Lord, while the former did not.

and aspirations immensely dear to their hearts was enthusiastically accepted by the people. The change in their religious conceptions was effected in a short time. Not long after the first exile Jeremiah could already contrast the religious conduct of the Babylonian exiles with that of those who were left behind in Judea, in the parable of the 'two baskets of figs'.<sup>23</sup> The Judeans in the old country still continued the practice of idolatry. But as soon as they came to Babylonia, after the complete destruction of Judea, most of them imitated the example of their fellow captives and accepted the religion of Jahveh. They had even more cause for detesting the Babylonians and their deities than the first exiles.<sup>24</sup>

The condition of the Jews who migrated to Egypt was different from that of the Babylonian captives. Egypt had done no harm to Judea. Though the latter suffered a terrible defeat, twenty years before the destruction of the Temple, at the hands of the Egyptians at Megiddo,<sup>25</sup> Egypt was not responsible for this calamity. It was due to the presumption and short-sightedness of the Judean government. Being assured that the king of Egypt

<sup>23</sup> Jer. 24. 3. The same is seen from the letter sent to the captives (29. 1-32). But not all of them had at that time abandoned idolatry (see n. 15).

<sup>24</sup> We may assume that the captives at the final destruction of Judea, who had proved themselves faithless to the Babylonian in their covenant with the Babylonian king, were not treated with some consideration as were those who were exiled with Jehoiachin. This may perhaps be the reason why the last chapters of Jeremiah show such a deep-rooted hatred toward Babylonia, and so strangely contrast with the sentiments of this prophet toward the Babylonian empire. Jeremiah may have learned in Egypt of the sufferings of those exiles at the hands of the Babylonians, and thus his sentiments toward them naturally changed.

<sup>25</sup> 2 Kings 23. 29; 2 Chron. 35. 20-24. Cf. Graetz, *Hist.*, p. 296 f.

had no hostile intentions against Judea, Josiah had no reason to prevent the passing of the Egyptian army through his borderland to Syria. At the time of Judea's final destruction and conquest by Babylonia, the Egyptians were the allies of that country and made an attempt to come to its rescue.<sup>26</sup> The Judean immigrants expected to find a safe refuge in the land of their former allies, were no doubt received in a friendly way by the Egyptians, and accordingly felt a deep gratitude towards their kind hosts. 'The Queen of Heaven', to whom the immigrants sacrificed, was an Egyptian goddess whose cult had been introduced into Judea long before the reform of Josiah.<sup>27</sup> Thus the immigrants had not the least reason for abandoning the worship of this goddess, since they believed that her wrath for having been formerly abandoned by them was the cause of their present condition. We do not know whether at that time the Jahveh-cult was given up altogether. It is more probable that along with the worship of Jahveh the Egyptian Jews practised idolatry, as they formerly did in Judea. But after the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses, the intercourse of the Egyptian Jews with their Babylonian

<sup>26</sup> Jer. 37. 5, 6-11.

<sup>27</sup> Graetz, *Hist.* I, p. 300, asserts that the worship of the 'Queen of Heaven' was introduced after the battle of Megiddo. The improbability of such an opinion is evident, as the Jews would never have accepted voluntarily the cult of a people at whose hands they suffered a terrible defeat and to whom they had to pay a heavy indemnity. Moreover, the words of the immigrants: 'But we will certainly do whatsoever goeth forth of our own mouth, to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and princes, in the cities of Judah' (Jer. 44. 17), prove that her cult in Judah must have dated from an earlier period. The Egyptians were continually on friendly terms with Israel and Judea and the other Western states, since the Assyrians started their conquests in the West, and the Judeans may have adopted the cult of that goddess at that period.

brethren was not without influence, and many of them may have become pure worshippers of Jahveh.<sup>28</sup>

As a rule, religion plays a minor, not to say an insignificant part, in the affairs of those who live in affluence. The religious propaganda was successful among the poor and middle classes of the Judean captives. The nobles, however, who exercised a certain authority over their poor brethren,<sup>29</sup> were soon reconciled to the exilic conditions. Having been the leaders of the people, they came in contact with the government officials, and entertained friendly relations with many Babylonians. Out of deference to the latter, and in order to keep on good terms with them, these nobles were quite willing to pay their respects to the Babylonian deities. There were others who became prosperous by commerce, and were quite contented with their present conditions in the great Babylonian metropolis, where they found more opportunities for accumulating riches than in their former agricultural country. Being satisfied with their new surroundings, they had no ill will towards the king and the people who transplanted them to Babylonia, and thus no reason for refusing to worship the gods of this country. Those Jews, though representing a small portion of the captives, were, on account of their influence, a constant menace to the religious movement. The activity of the prophets was directed against them.

<sup>28</sup> But the Elephantine Papyri (published by Sachau, Leipzig, 1911) seem to indicate that the Egyptian Jews were not pure worshippers of Jahveh in the fifth and fourth centuries B. C. E. There may, however, have been a number who accepted the religious conceptions of the Babylonian Jews, and the sanctity of the Temple of Jeb was not recognized by them.

<sup>29</sup> See Ezek. 34. There can be no doubt that these 'shepherds' were the leaders of the Jews in the captivity. Cf. Graetz, *l. c.*, p. 332, and Renan, *l. c.* VI, 1.



However, they had little regard for the prophets, and ridiculed their prophecies.<sup>30</sup> 'The elders of Israel' frequently visited Ezekiel, but not for the purpose of listening to his teachings.<sup>31</sup> The prophet being respected, and enjoying the highest authority among the common people, it was a matter of policy to occasionally ask his advice, in order to give to their measures divine sanction.<sup>32</sup> Hypocritically they asked for a divine message. But he was well acquainted with their conduct, and they could not deceive him. 'What do you idolaters care for God and His messages?' was his reply. Whenever he addressed the elders of Israel he accused them of idolatry.<sup>33</sup> To the common people, however, he spoke in a different tone, comforting them and correcting their religious conceptions.<sup>34</sup> As long as the influential men among the captives were not won over to the religious party, the existence of the Jewish religion was precarious.

The religious propaganda could not be carried on secretly. The publicity which it aroused could not fail to engender bad feeling among the Babylonians. Combatting and deriding idolatrous conceptions in the very centre of the Babylonian cult was nothing short of high treason.<sup>35</sup> Such a movement was undoubtedly the cause

<sup>30</sup> Ezek. 21. 5.

<sup>31</sup> If the elders of Israel practised idolatry, we cannot assume that they were in earnest in visiting the prophet and listening to his admonitions.

<sup>32</sup> It is nearly the same at present in some European countries, as the present writer knows from his personal knowledge, that wealthy men of influence who are personally indifferent to religious observances, stand at the head of strictly religious congregations and consult the orthodox Rabbis upon all measures they want to carry through.

<sup>33</sup> Ezek. 14, 20.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 18, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38. 25-9.

<sup>35</sup> It is inconceivable how Renan (*History*, VI, 1) came upon the idea

of numerous persecutions,<sup>36</sup> which, however, had no discouraging effect upon the zeal of the pious Jews. On the contrary, even those who had held aloof from the religious movement could not remain unaffected by the sufferings of their brethren. It is easy to sneer at religious ideas, but they assume a different aspect when one sees men willing to pay for them with their lives. However, this sympathy did not have an immediate effect. Those wealthy Jews preferred their own comfort above everything, and were not inclined to expose themselves to persecutions by abandoning idolatrous practices. They were not of the stuff of which martyrs are made.

The conquest of Babylon by Cyrus dealt a death-blow to the Babylonian religion. The superstitious belief in Bēl's power was shattered. Idolatry, though still tolerated, was no longer fashionable. The seeds of the Jewish religion now found a fruitful soil even in the hearts of the wealthy people, who gave up idolatry and joined the Jewish community. Nevertheless they still remained indifferent members, without high regard for the observances of the Jewish laws. They were the people of whom the Babylonian Isaiah said: 'They who are eating swine's

that the Babylonians at that period denied both the gods and Providence. The Babylonians were certainly at that period just as religious as ever.

<sup>36</sup> Graetz (*History*, I, p. 334) states that the violent hatred of the Jews toward Babylonia was caused by Nabunaid's refusal to grant them permission to return to their own country. But the letter of Jeremiah stated that they had to remain in the captivity seventy years (29. 10). The pious Jews were firm believers in the prophetic prediction, and thus did not cherish any hope of an earlier return. The indifferent Jews felt comfortable in that country, and were not eager to leave it. Even if we should see in that prediction a later interpolation, we have not the least evidence for an assumption that Nabunaid had been kindly disposed towards the captives on his accession to the throne, and later changed his mind.

flesh, and broth of abominated things is in their vessels.' <sup>37</sup>

If the Jews detested the Babylonian religion as being the creed of their oppressors, it stands to reason that they loved the Persian religion as being that of their liberators. This love would have been disastrous to the establishment of the Jewish religion if the Persians had been idolaters. The mere fact that the Persian religion did not do much harm to the Jewish religious conceptions is in itself a sufficient proof that there were no great differences between the principal doctrines of both the Jewish and Persian religions.

Ahuramazda was a purely spiritual god, not represented by any image, according to the Avesta. His emblem, adopted by the Iranians from the Assyrians,<sup>38</sup> consisting of a winged ring floating in the air with a human figure rising from the circular space, was not considered an idol.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Isa. 65. 4. This accusation does not refer to those who practised idolatry. No prophet would have blamed idolaters for not observing the dietary laws. On the contrary, if the latter had observed them, the prophets would have ridiculed their conduct. The prophet in those passages describes different kinds of Jewish transgressors; some were real idolaters, sacrificing in gardens and burning incense upon altars of brick; others were superstitious, remaining among the graves and lodging in the monuments, and practised necromancy; and others finally had already abandoned all those practices, but still continued to eat swine's flesh.

<sup>38</sup> This was the emblem of the Assyrian god Ashur (see Justi, *History*, p. 69, and Ed. Meyer, *G. A.*, III, p. 123). If Zoroastrianism dates from the beginning of the sixth century, we must assume that the adopting of this emblem was pre-Zoroastrian, and that Zoroaster did not consider it an idolatrous representation.

<sup>39</sup> See Ed. Meyer, *ibid.* Justi, however, is of the opinion that the religion of the Achæamenides was not identical with that of the Avesta, as the latter prohibits the representation of Ahuramazda by an image. But then he would have to go a step further and maintain that the religion of the Sassanides, the most fanatical adherents of the Zoroastrian religion,

The essential part of this emblem was the winged ring and not the human figure, as this emblem was represented frequently without the latter.<sup>40</sup> This divinity was not the supreme god of the Persians, but actually the only one. The Daēvas, the gods of the popular belief, were, according to the teaching of Zoroaster, to be regarded as spurious deities, and their priests and votaries as heretics.<sup>41</sup> The angels, by whom Ahuramazda was surrounded, originally represented abstract ideas.<sup>42</sup> However, at a later period, when the Zoroastrian religion became corrupt, they assumed the character of the former Daēvas.<sup>43</sup> The power of Ahuramazda, the god of light, having continually to strive under whose rule the Avesta was compiled, was not identical with that of the Avesta either, as the Sassanides represented Ahuramazda in human shape. Thus we cannot but assume that the Persians did not look upon these figures as representations.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. George Rawlinson, *Herodotus*, vol. I, p. 208, n. 3. That this symbol was not regarded as an image is seen from Berossus who was no doubt well acquainted with the Persian religion, and nevertheless asserts that the Persians knew of no images of the gods before Artaxerxes II (see chapter VI).

<sup>41</sup> See K. F. Geldner's article 'Zoroaster' in the *Enc. Brit.* J. Darmesteter (*Zend-Avesta*, p. 59) observes that Mazdeism struggled on towards unity: the Lord (Ahura) slowly brought everything under his unquestioned supremacy, and the other gods became not only his subjects, but his creatures. Justi, in his *History*, remarks: 'All these things have in Zoroastrianism an essentially different position than in the natural religion. They have given up their character as gods, and preserved only their cosmic sphere of action. They are creatures and servants of the supreme god' (p. 82).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Geldner, *l. c.* Darmesteter, *l. c.*, p. 71, observes: 'They were at first mere personifications of virtue and moral or liturgical powers; but as their lord and father ruled over the whole world, they each took by and by a part of the world under their care.'

<sup>43</sup> In Armenia, at least, some of the *Amshaspands* possessed their own sanctuaries; cf. the article 'Armenia' (Zoroastrian) by H. M. Ananikian, in Hastings's *Encyclop. of Religion and Ethics*, and Ed. Meyer, *G. A.*, III, p. 127 f.

with Anra-Mainyu, the god of darkness, was seemingly limited. Notwithstanding this conception, he was, to all intents and purposes, the only god. The conception of the power of darkness in the Zoroastrian religion corresponds to that of the spiritual enemy of mankind, the Evil One, in the Christian religion, who is feared, but not worshipped.<sup>44</sup> The term *dualism* applied to the Persian religion is a misnomer. The two opposing forces of light and darkness represent the principles of good and evil. There is no good without its counterpart, evil. The latter being the destructive element in nature, it is reasonable that man should place himself under the protection of the good, constructive principle. Ahuramazda himself was originally, to a certain extent, placed above these opposing forces, as has been pointed out.<sup>45</sup> In a later period, however, the Holy Spirit was made equivalent to him.<sup>46</sup> This would

<sup>44</sup> Herodotus VII, 114 seems to contradict that assumption, as he tells us: 'I have heard that Amestris, the wife of Xerxes, in her old age, buried alive seven pairs of Persian youths, sons of illustrious men, as a thank-offering to the god who is supposed to dwell underneath the earth.' But Zoroastrianism is just as little responsible for the superstition of Amestris as Christianity for some mad witches who worshipped the devil. George Rawlinson (*ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 8) holds as probable that Herodotus merely speaks as a Greek. In the Avesta there is no vestige of such a cult. That god Anra-mainyu, being the personification of the evil principle, was naturally unlike any other deity that could be propitiated by sacrifices. Justi, in his *History*, observes: 'If the ancient writers inform us that the Persians sacrificed to Hades, we may recognize therein a feature of the Median religion of the Magians' (p. 83). The latter religion, however, was not identical with that of Ahuramazda, but represents the old Iranian belief.

<sup>45</sup> A similar opinion is expressed by Darmesteter, *l. c.*, p. 82: 'When the Magi had accounted for the existence of evil by the existence of two principles, there arose the question how there could be two principles, and a longing for unity was felt, which found its satisfaction that both are derived from the same principle.'

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Geldner's 'Zoroaster', *Encycl. Brit.*, and Justi's *Hist.*, p. 83.

account for the fact that Darius, in his Behistun Inscription, does not mention Anra-Mainyu.<sup>47</sup> Besides, the limitation of Ahuramazda's power was held to be merely temporary, as he was bound after a certain period to be victorious, and destroy his enemy.<sup>48</sup>

To scholarly minds there might have been great differences between the Jewish and Persian conceptions concerning the Divine Nature. However, to the average man, Jahveh and Ahuramazda were identical in all respects but in name.<sup>49</sup> The Persian religion having no images, no temples, and no altars,<sup>50</sup> the Jews did not see any transgression in acknowledging Ahuramazda as God, and identifying him with Jahveh.<sup>51</sup> We may assume that they

<sup>47</sup> It has been contended that Darius did not know anything about Zoroaster, since he does not mention Anra-Mainyu in his Behistun inscription.

<sup>48</sup> Geldner, *l. c.*, and Justi, *l. c.*, p. 83.

<sup>49</sup> Graetz (*History*, I, p. 402) is certainly correct in his remark: 'They contrasted that doctrine with their own belief that the God of Israel created light and darkness, good and evil.' A similar opinion is expressed by Alfred Jeremias (*The Old Testament in the Light of the Ancient East*, II, p. 276): 'The assumption that the prophet (Isa. 45. 7, 12) combats the theology of Zarathustra, at least in its exoteric interpretation, is well founded.' He further observes (n. 2): 'The esoteric religion of Zarathustra is not dualistic in the proper sense.' But the contrary may be true. Zoroaster's esoteric religion was dualistic, and the prophet called attention just to this fundamental principle which the common people did not perceive. But so subtle a distinction could scarcely have made any impression upon the average Jew. Moreover, it was no easy task to convince the people that God himself was the creator of evil. The very idea of the prophet that God created the darkness evidently contrasted with the story of Creation in which the first divine act was the creation of light.

<sup>50</sup> Herodotus I, 131.

<sup>51</sup> It looks as if the Persians themselves saw in Jahveh their own God Ahuramazda under a different name. Marquart (*Fundamente*, p. 49) indeed contends that 'the God of Heaven' (Ezra 7 12, 21, 23) is Ahuramazda. This conjecture is not without foundation. The edict of Artaxerxes, in which enormous powers are conferred upon a Jewish priest, even to impose

did not fail, whenever there was an opportunity, to impress upon the minds of the Persian officials the close relationship of their own religion to that of the Persians, and thus justly claim special favours.

During the Babylonian period, the distinctive mark of 'Jews' (יהודים) was the rejection of idols. Under Persian rule, however, this fact ceased to be the criterion of the latter, as the true Zoroastrians did the same. Zoroastrianism having adherents everywhere throughout the Persian empire, a Jew, not caring to reveal his identity, could live among Gentiles all his lifetime without being recognized as an adherent of the Jewish religion. A strictly pious Jew could

the death penalty upon those who disobey the Jewish Law, is quite incomprehensible. The Persian rulers were very tolerant towards the creeds of their subjects. There is nothing improbable in granting the Jews permission to return to their old home, to rebuild the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem, and to live according to their own laws. But it is rather strange that a Persian king should have been so solicitous about the promulgation of the Jewish Law as to impose it by force upon those who had no inclination to accept it. Hence it is no surprise to find that the authenticity of that edict is denied by Kuenen (*Hist.-krit. Einleitung*, I, p. 165), Kisters (*Het Herstel van Israel*, 1903, p. 114), Wellhausen (*Israel. und jüd. Geschichte*, 1914, p. 160), Th. Nöldeke (*Gött. Gel. Anz.*, 1884, 1014), and others. Ed. Meyer (*Entst. d. Jud.*, p. 60 f.), however, has clearly demonstrated that this document is absolutely genuine. But his explanation that Artaxerxes was superstitious, and that the promulgation of the Law had to be sanctioned by the government is very forced. There is no parallel between favours granted to the Greeks in religious matters and those granted to Ezra. A polytheistic religion does not interfere with other polytheistic creeds, while the promulgation of the Jewish Law involved intolerance toward other creeds. We therefore suggest that this promulgation was a matter of policy on the part of Artaxerxes. The latter looked upon the Jewish creed as being identical with that of the Persians. He was desirous of introducing the latter belief in the Western countries in order to connect them more firmly with his empire, and he saw in the Jewish Law such a connecting link between these inhabitants and the Persians. We shall deal with this subject further on in chapter VII, n. 59.

not have done so, on account of his observance of the ritual laws. But at that period these laws had not yet been firmly rooted in the hearts of the Jewish people, and many of them may have neglected them.<sup>52</sup> The wealthy cared more, as we have seen, for their own comfort than for religion. Many among them, indifferent to the religious observances, in all probability pretended to be Zoroastrians, and concealed their religion. Examples of this kind of Jews we may see in Mordecai and Esther.

Mordecai was born in Babylonia, as we may conclude from the pure Babylonian name he bears. The fact that he could rise later to a high position in Persia seems to indicate that he came to Persia in his early youth, and received a Persian education.<sup>53</sup> He was a member of one of the distinguished families which had been carried into the Babylonian captivity with the Judean king Jeconiah (=Jehoiachin). We have already observed that those noble families were soon reconciled to their fate, and were idolaters. Under Persian rule, however, idolatry having gone out of fashion, they apparently abandoned it, as evidenced by the fact that the late prophets do not accuse any Jew of idolatry. But even then they were not quite averse to the worship of the Babylonian deities, being indifferent to both the Babylonian and the Jewish religions. There can be little room for doubt that the father of Mordecai was a Jew of that type. In Babylonia a proper name compounded with the name of a deity was intimately

<sup>52</sup> The Rabbis accuse the Jews of that period of having partaken of the feast of Ahasuerus (*Megillah* 12a). They correctly judged that the Jewish observances were neglected at that period.

<sup>53</sup> According to Flavius Josephus, in his story of Esther, Mordecai moved from Babylon to Susa after Esther had been taken into the house of the king. This is of course pure fancy.



connected with the religious belief of its bearer, as may be seen from the seal cylinders.<sup>54</sup> The bearer of a name Nabū-našir, 'the god Nabū protects', was a votary of the god Nabū. The name Mordecai is a hypocoristicon of a complex name compounded with the divine name Marduk. Thus the full name was undoubtedly of idolatrous character. If the Talmudic statement, 'Mordecai is identical with Bilshan',<sup>55</sup> is based on tradition, the compounded name of Mordecai was *Marduk-bēl-shūnu*, 'Marduk is their lord'.<sup>56</sup> Such a name could be borne only by a worshipper of the god Marduk. But that does not prove that Mordecai's father was an idolater. To ease his son's path through life, that he should not be hampered with an outlandish name which stamps one as an alien, his father gave him a pure Babylonian name. Many modern Jews in European countries, where biblical names are very seldom met with among Christians, consider it likewise a disadvantage for the future career of their children to be named Abraham,

<sup>54</sup> Cf. J. Krausz, *Die Götternamen in den Babylonischen Siegelcylinder-Legenden*, München, 1910, pp. 15 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Megillah 15a and Menahoth 65a. However, the Talmud had not the slightest notion of the meaning of *Bilshan*, and explained it as 'master of the languages, linguist' (בעל לשון), as he was said to have been a member of the Sanhedrin, and was therefore supposed to understand 'seventy languages', that is to say, he had to understand the various idioms in use in Palestine, and not to have to rely upon the services of an interpreter. The explanation of *Bilshan* presents a counterpart to that of Mordecai, which is explained as 'pure myrrh' (מרה רביא), the Aramaic translation of מֶרְיָר (Exod. 30. 23). The fact that the Rabbis did not know the meaning of *Bilshan*, and nevertheless connect it with Mordecai, seems to point to a true tradition. As a matter of fact, *Bel-shūnu* is an abbreviated name, and so is Mordecai.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Nabū-bēl-shūnu*, *Nin-ib-bēl-shūnu*, *Sha-la-bēl(ti?)-shūnu* (cf. Tallquist, *Neubabylonisches Namenbuch*, Helsingfors, 1905; *Assyrian Personal Names*, 1914). Many of the numerous names *Marduka*, *Marduku* (see *ibid.*) may be hypocoristica of *Marduk-bēl-shūnu*.

Moses, &c. No Jew with any regard for his religion would have given his son a name that implied his being dedicated to the worship of Marduk. But Jair was not an exception in this respect. It was customary among the indifferent Babylonian Jews to name their children *Arad-Gula*, *Nana-nadin*, *Ninib-muballiṣ*, *Sin-naṣir*, &c.,<sup>57</sup> as may be seen from the business documents of those periods. But it may be of interest to observe that we very seldom find names of idolatrous character borne by relatives of those whose names are compounded with the divine name *Ṣawa*.<sup>58</sup> The latter were, as it seems, characteristic of the religious conduct of their bearers and their families as faithful worshippers of Jahveh. Mordecai was not better in this respect, if not worse, than his father, and by no means proud of his religion. Though exercising, as it seems, some authority over his humbler co-religionists in Susa, as did his distinguished family in Babylonia, he was anxious to conceal his Jewish identity, which under Zoroastrianism it was easy to accomplish, without transgressing the main tenet of the Jewish religion. The name Mordecai

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Babyl. Exp.*, IX, x and Tallquist, *l.c.* That the bearers of such names are Jews may be seen by the names of their fathers or sons. Renan (*History*, VI, 1) remarks: 'A great many Jews became servants of the households of the Chaldean nobility and adopted Chaldean names, without troubling themselves about the paganism implied by these names. It did not entail any apostasy and was no more shocking than when the Jews of the Roman epoch called themselves Apollonius or Hermes.' His analogies are wrong. Strictly religious Jews never adopted in post-exilic times names implying paganism. The name Apollonius is a mere translation of the Hebrew name *Samson*, and the name Hermes means literally 'interpreter', and a Jew may bear such a name, even if it is also that of a Greek god. It would be different if a Jew would be called *Apollodorus* or *Isidorus*. They would certainly be characteristic of the indifference toward the Jewish religion on the part of their hearers.

<sup>58</sup> See chapter IX.

being Babylonian, we may assume that he had for special use in his dealings with Persians a pure Persian name.<sup>59</sup>

Esther, like Mordecai, was born in Babylonia. Her name, undoubtedly identical with that of the goddess *Ishtar* = Astarte, is a hypocoristicon of a complex name compounded with that of this goddess. Her full name may have been *Ishtar-udda-sha*, 'Ishtar is her light', which would account for her two names, אֶסְתֵּר and הִדָּסָה, both abbreviations, = אֶסְתֵּר-הִדָּסָה.<sup>60</sup> But it is perhaps more probable that the name הִדָּסָה is the Persian *Hutaosa*, rendered into Greek as *Atossa*,<sup>61</sup> and was adopted by her in Persia. Whatever her compounded name may have been, the name Esther = *Ishtar* evidently shows that Abihail, Esther's father, was a worthy brother of Mordecai's father, Jair. Having lost both parents in her childhood, Esther was brought to Susa and adopted by Mordecai. He could not give her a better Jewish education than he himself possessed. Their real

<sup>59</sup> We find names compounded with *ud-da*, cf. Tallquist, *Namenbuch*. This word is a synonym of *urru*, *ūru* = אֹר 'light', and of *nūru* = נֹר, of the same meaning, and is etymologically identical with Hebrew הֹר 'splendour', which is used also in the formation of Hebrew proper names (see Hebr. Dictionary). Both synonyms are found in cuneiform proper names, as in *Ilu-ur-ri*, *U-<sup>ru</sup>-l Ma-lik*, &c.; *Nūri-Ishtar*, &c. (see Tallquist, *l. c.*) That *ud-du* does not refer merely to the 'daylight'; though UD = *Shamash*, may be seen from the name *Nabū-shakin-ud-du*, 'the god Nabū makes light' (cf. *ibid.*). This noun may have been pronounced *hud-du*, according to the etymology. We see that even the Sumero-Babylonian word *ekal*, 'great house, temple, palace' was by the Hebrews pronounced *hēkāl*.

<sup>60</sup> Stanley, *History of the Jewish Church*, III, p. 196, remarks: 'Hadassah (her Hebrew name) is either "myrtle", or else a Hebraized form of the Persian *Atossa*.' But the Hebrew form stands nearer to the Persian name *Hutaosah* than the Greek rendering *Atossa*. Cf. Cassel, *l. c.*, p. 54.

<sup>61</sup> Many of those opposed to Rabbinic Judaism, whose aim was at the start to abrogate its rigid observances, found that they could not draw a strict line between the latter and those of the Mosaic Law.

characters are shown in the second chapter of the Book of Esther.

Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy, the two opposing tendencies within Judaism, are by no means peculiar to and characteristic of our enlightened era. They are as old as Judaism itself, though in each age, in accordance with the prevailing ideas, Heterodoxy assumed a different character. As long as idolatry was fashionable, the Heterodox were idolaters; in the Alexandrian age, Hellenists; under the Maccabees, Sadducees; during the Jewish-Christian era, adherents of the Christian doctrines; in the period of the Geonim, K̄araites; in the Middle Ages, philosophers; and at a later period, Cabbalists. Orthodoxy, the real representative of that Judaism established during and after the Babylonian captivity,<sup>62</sup> has survived all these changes. The same two

<sup>62</sup> The passage **לֹא הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת עֲמָהּ וְאֶת מוֹלֶדֶתָּהּ** is not quite clear. The terms **עֲמָהּ** and **מוֹלֶדֶתָּהּ** here and in the similar passage **אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מִנֶּגֶד מוֹלֶדֶתָּהּ וְאֶת עֲמָהּ** (II, 20) might be regarded as hendiadys. But that is scarcely true of the other passage: **כִּי אֵיכָכָה אוֹכֵל וְרֵאִיתִי בָרָעָה**: 'For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?' (VIII, 6). The term **מוֹלֶדֶתָּהּ** means either 'native place' or 'kindred'. The former meaning is here impossible, as Esther's native place was Babylonia, and the latter very improbable. But **מוֹלֶדֶתָּהּ** may mean also 'place of origin', and could refer to Judea. Such an interpretation is not impossible, as the execution of Haman's edict involved the destruction of the Jewish state, as we shall further see. But it is strange that the terms **עֲמָהּ וְמוֹלֶדֶתָּהּ** are nowhere found, outside of Esther, in the Old Testament. We find only **אֶרֶץ מוֹלֶדֶתָּהּ** or **אֶרֶץ מוֹלֶדֶתָּהּ**. Hence there is room for doubt whether the original text contained the word **מוֹלֶדֶתָּהּ**. We shall find that Haman's edict was not directed against the Jewish race, but against those who were adherents of the Jewish religion. They were in no danger, if they abandoned it. But at a later period, the real issue of that event was not known any longer. The term **דָּת**, a Persian loan-word (which occurs so often in Esther), in the passage **וְדִתֵּיהֶם שְׁנוֹת מִכָּל עַם** 'their laws are diverse from all people', refers of

tendencies in Judaism are met with in the times of Mordecai and Esther.

Esther II.  
10

The author of our story states: 'Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred; for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it'.<sup>63</sup> He tells it so frankly and naively, without giving any reason for such a conduct, as if it were the most natural way and a matter of course, and not a dastardly act, for a Jew to conceal his religion. It was indeed unnecessary for the author to explain why Mordecai charged Esther not to disclose her Jewish identity, as we can read the reason between the lines. Relying upon Esther's great charms, which, in his belief, could not fail to captivate the king's heart, Mordecai was apprehensive of her being excluded from the competition for the rank of queen if she was known as an adherent of the Jewish religion. For her elevation he was ready and willing to sacrifice her religion.<sup>64</sup> If Mordecai had been imbued with

course to the Jewish religion. The identical term is used in the Mishnah in דת יהודית 'the Jewish Law', and דת משה וישראל 'the Law of Moses and Israel'. Hence we venture the following suggestion. The same word דת might have been contained in the original text in the passages quoted. But a later copyist changed the word דת into מולדת, believing that דת and עם are superfluous synonyms, as a member of the Jewish race is of course an adherent of the Jewish religion. Thus the original meaning of the passages II, 10. 20 might have been: Esther kept secret her people and her religion. In her supplication to the king, Esther complained not only about the evil that shall come unto her people, but also about the disappearance of the Jewish creed. Siegfried, *l.c.*, is correct in objecting that מולדת is here out of place.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn Ezra remarks: 'Some say that Mordecai was wrong in commanding Esther not to disclose her origin, because he feared that he might not take her for a wife if he knew that she was one of the exiles. But others say that Mordecai learned in a dream that Esther was destined to save Israel'.

<sup>64</sup> Paton, *l.c.*, p. 178, observes: 'There is nothing of the martyr-spirit in Mordecai, as in Daniel and his friends who display their Judaism at all

the spirit of Ezra and Nehemiah, there is no doubt that rather than giving her in marriage to a Gentile he would have slain his adopted daughter with his own hands, and he would certainly have charged her to disclose her religion.<sup>65</sup> If Esther had been a true daughter of Israel she would have done everything in her power not to become the wife of a Gentile, preferring the observance of her religion to the rank of a queen.<sup>66</sup> On informing the keeper of the harem of her religion, Esther would have done her duty, and been free from blame if he had kept her notwithstanding that reason,<sup>67</sup> as we could not condemn her for not having been courageous enough to prefer death to that fate.

However, on the other hand, the question presents itself: Why did Mordecai so ardently desire to see Esther as queen? Was it due to his ambition? Certainly not! If he had been ambitious, it would have been easy for him

costs. So long as there is any advantage in hiding it, he does not let Esther tell her race; only when secrecy is no longer useful, does he bid her disclose it' (see n. 68).

<sup>65</sup> The author of the apocryphal additions to the Greek version of Esther could not comprehend either how the pious Esther could have acted in that way, and lets her say in her prayer: 'Thou hast knowledge of all things, and thou knowest that I hate the glory of the wicked and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised and of every alien'. This prayer is characteristic of the mode of thinking of religious Jews of the Graeco-Roman period concerning intermarriage.

<sup>66</sup> See, however, Cassel, p. 61 f.

<sup>67</sup> The commentators who think that Esther concealed not only her Jewish origin, but also her kinship to Mordecai, must admit that the latter could hardly have profited anything by Esther's exalted position. Moreover, they assume that 'Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate' as a loungeur, and not in an official character. Thus what advantage was there for Mordecai? Hence it is evident that Mordecai did not act out of selfish motives in furthering the elevation of Esther, but for the welfare of his people (see n. 64).

to be appointed to a high position after the elevation of Esther, or at least after having saved the king's life. Thus it is evident that his desire that Esther should be elevated to the rank of queen was not prompted by selfish motives.<sup>68</sup> Although concealing his own religion, Mordecai was nevertheless solicitous for the welfare of his people, and was convinced that Esther on becoming queen would be in a position to render them many useful services, as indeed she was.

However so prudent and farsighted the policy of Mordecai, in his endeavour to elevate Esther, may have been for the benefit of the Jewish people; from a purely religious point of view, we either must condemn his conduct or accept utility as the sole standard of rectitude. An approval of Mordecai's action would give full licence to intermarriage. We might say that that prohibition under certain circumstances may be disregarded, if any essential advantage would accrue to the Jewish people or to some Jewish community from such an intermarriage. It would be wellnigh impossible to draw a strict line between a marriage to a king, a high official, or any other person. But Mordecai no doubt belonged to that party which espoused intermarriage between the Jews in Palestine and their non-Jewish neighbours, as by these alliances they were strengthening their own position.<sup>69</sup> That policy, however, though of great advantage to the newly-established Jewish state, was disastrous to the Jewish religion, and we may doubt whether the latter would have survived if such a

<sup>68</sup> That party was in all other respects just as strict worshippers of Jahveh as Ezra and Nehemiah, since even the family of the High-priest was related by marriage to the Samaritan Sanballat and to other non-Judaeans.

<sup>69</sup> See chapter VIII.

practice would have been permitted to continue. On the other hand, the zeal of Ezra and Nehemiah against inter-marriage caused many hardships to the Jewish people in Judea, and jeopardized the existence of the new state, but the Jewish religion remained pure and intact. Thus Ezra and Nehemiah represented Orthodoxy, while Mordecai was the representative of the Heterodox wing of Judaism of that period which advocated intermarriage.

It is characteristic of Jews in all periods that, though indifferent to religious observances, and being hardly recognized as members of the Jewish people, at times of religious persecutions they do not stand aloof from their suffering brethren, but identify themselves with them in every respect, some of them becoming even more or less religious. The religious persecutions which soon broke out had the same effect upon Mordecai. Seeing the sufferings of the Jews, Mordecai openly declared his adherence to the Jewish religion,<sup>70</sup> and did everything in his power to assist his brethren. But a change produced by sympathy, not conviction, never has a lasting effect. Mordecai, after his elevation to the rank of prime minister, was not and could not have been religious. The Rabbinic homiletic interpretation of the passage, 'He was pleasing to most of his brethren', that it meant to indicate that a part of the Sanhedrin separated themselves from him,<sup>71</sup> contains a great deal of truth, even more than the rabbis intended to imply. *A part of his brethren* refused to have any intercourse with Mordecai. Even among the Sanhedrin, the leaders of Israel, the strictly religious Jews, who do not barter the tenets of their religion for worldly advantages,

<sup>70</sup> Cf. also Renan, *History*, VI, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Megillah 16 b.



though being in all periods Israel's very representatives and preservers, always form only a small fraction. And men of that type refused to associate with him.

The Book of Esther was in all probability composed in Babylonia, not Palestine,<sup>72</sup> as the former country was for a considerable period the real centre of Jewish learning. It undoubtedly was composed at a time when the personalities of Mordecai and Esther were still well known. Its compilers were the Sopherim, who strictly adhered to the principles of Ezra and Nehemiah. Upon them devolved the task of commemorating an event, in which the opponents of the latter, against whose principles they still had continually to fight, figured as heroes and saviours of Israel. Those Sopherim were in a most embarrassing situation. They could not deny the fact that Mordecai and Esther, though having been transgressors of the Law, actually effected the rescue of Israel's religion. Not to record such an event would have been disgraceful.<sup>73</sup> But

<sup>72</sup> But they did not put this story in writing during the life-time of Mordecai and Esther (see following notes and chapters VII, IX).

<sup>73</sup> Megillah 7a: 'Esther sent to the sages, saying: "Record this event of mine for future generations." But they sent back: "It is written, Have I not written for thee three times?" (Prov. 22. 20). This passage teaches that any event should be recorded only three times, and not four times, and the memory of Amalek's destruction is already recorded three times. (Thus they refused to record it) until they found for her a biblical verse: "Write this for a memorial in a book" (Exod. 16. 14): "write this" refers to the records made by Moses himself, here and Deuteronomy 25. 17-19; "for a memorial" refers to that which is written in the historical records of the prophets (1 Sam. 15. 1-34): "in a book" refers to the event of Purim, the story of which ought to be represented in a special Book' שלחה להם אסתר לחכמים כתבוננו לדורות שלחו לה 'הלא כתבתי לך' שלישים' שלישים ולא רביעים, עד שמצאו לה מקרא כתוב בתורה 'כתוב זאת זכרון בספר' כתוב זאת מה שכתוב כאן ובמשנה תורה, (זכרון מה שכתוב בנביאים, בספר, מה שכתוב במגילה).

it could not be done without jeopardizing the religious principles for which they stood. To describe Mordecai and Esther as ardent adherents of the Jewish religion was impossible. The religious conduct of Mordecai and Esther was well known. Besides, the Sopherim would under no circumstances have consciously distorted the facts. To represent, however, non-religious Jews as God's chosen instruments for the preservation of Israel, would have been destructive to the ritual edifice they strove to preserve intact. The people would have been perplexed, and would have raised the question: How could the rites and observances be an essential part of the Law of Israel if God chose for his own instruments people who did not care for them? The only way out of this dilemma was to represent the events exactly as they happened, without suggesting that there was any divine intervention. In this way the compilers did not commit themselves, and the people could interpret this story each according to his own sentiments. In the present writer's opinion, a strictly orthodox rabbi of to-day would be in the same predicament, if compelled by circumstances to write the biography of a great Jewish philanthropist who was indifferent to all religious observances, and would have to act in the same way as the Sopherim did in the compilation of the Book of Esther, circumspectly avoiding all matters pertaining to religion.

There is a Talmudic statement that Esther requested the sages of her period to compile the story of that event, and they at first refused to comply with her request.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Rabbi Joshua, son of Ḥananiah (flourished about 100 c. E.), still held that this Book ought to have been put in writing, in explaining: 'write this' refers to what is written in Exodus; 'for a memorial' refers to the repetition of that commandment in Deuteronomy to remind Israel to keep it in their memory; 'in a book' refers to what is written in the Book of

Who knows whether this narrative is not based on some tradition? We can well imagine that it was Esther's just ambition to have the event in which she played such a conspicuous part recorded for the admiration of future generations, and that the Sopherim, confronted by the difficulty of such a task, used some subterfuge to be excused from compiling that story, in expressing their opinion that it ought to be handed down by tradition, like the Oral Law, and not to be recorded.<sup>75</sup> We may even assume that they definitely refused to undertake this compilation, and that the only record of that event consisted of the letters sent out by Mordecai and Esther.<sup>76</sup> Later, however, being afraid lest the Feast of Purim might assume a non-Jewish character, as we shall see further on,<sup>77</sup> the Sopherim could

כתוב זאת מה שכתוב כאן, זכרון מה שכתוב במשנה תורה) Samuel (בספר מה שכתוב בנביאים, *ibid.*). In the present writer's opinion, these homiletic explanations do not give the real reasons *pro* and *contra*. The Rabbis were averse to questioning the religious conduct of Mordecai, and therefore expressed their opinions in homiletic disguise.

<sup>75</sup> See chapter IV.

<sup>76</sup> We shall see that the Sopherim were even averse to the commemoration of this event, because the time of the celebration was simultaneous with that of a Persian festival. The Talmud indeed tells us: 'Esther sent to the sages: "Establish for me a festival for future generations". But they sent back: "Will you incite envy against us among the nations?"' She, however, sent back: "(There is no fear of that) as the event of mine is already written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia" (שלחה להם אסתר לחכמים קבעוני לדורות שלחו לה קנאה את) מעוררת עלינו לבין האומות שלחה להם כבר כתובה אני על ספר דברי מורד (Megillah 7a). In this homiletic saying we may perhaps see a trace of a tradition that the Sopherim refused to sanction the establishment of the festival of Purim. We observe, by the way, that this saying seems to confirm the suggestion in chapter IV, that the existence of the Book of Esther may have caused trouble to the Jews in the East in a certain period, 'inciting envy against them among the nations'.

<sup>77</sup> The saying אסתר אינו מטמא את הידים 'the Book of Esther does

not but compile the story of that event, and order its reading on the day of this Festival. Both Rabbi Joshua and Samuel in decreeing that 'the Book of Esther does not defile the hands',<sup>78</sup> were undoubtedly displeased with the non-religious style of the book, and considered such a defect just as bad as the scepticism of Ecclesiastes.<sup>79</sup> Looking upon Mordecai and Esther as saints in Israel, and on the compilers of that book as having been inspired by the Holy Spirit, the non-religious character of that book was beyond their comprehension. They may have believed that the Sopherim did not dare to represent Ahasuerus as an instrument of the God of Israel,<sup>80</sup> and therefore omitted all religious elements. Those rabbis, however, did not approve of such a procedure. In their opinion, if a book that records such a signal rescue of Israel had to be devoid of all religious elements, the records of that event ought not to have been put in writing, but handed down by tradition. This is the real meaning of the Talmudic inter-

not defile the hands', is mentioned only in the name of Samuel, not in that of Rabbi Joshua. Since, however, we are informed that 'Samuel holds the opinion of Rabbi Joshua', that Esther ought not to have been recorded, we must assume that in the latter's opinion, Esther does not belong to the sacred Books, and thus does not defile the hands (see *ibid.*).

<sup>78</sup> As to Ecclesiastes, there are divergent opinions: 'Rabbi Meir says: 'Ecclesiastes does not defile the hands, but there is disagreement concerning Canticles'; Rabbi Jose says: 'Canticles defiles the hands, but there is disagreement concerning Ecclesiastes'; Rabbi Simeon says: 'Ecclesiastes belongs to the decisions in which the School of Shammai was more lenient than the School of Hillel, but Ruth, Canticles, and Esther defile the hands' (רבי מאיר אמר קזלת אינו מטמא את הידים ומחלוקת בשיר השירים), רבי יוסי אומר שיר השירים מטמא את הידים ומחלוקת בקהלת רבי שמעון אומר קהלת מקולי בית שמאי ומחומרי בית הלל אבל רות ושיר (השירים ואסתר מטמאין את הידים), *ibid.*, &c.

<sup>79</sup> See note 72.

<sup>80</sup> אסתר נאמרה לקרות ולא נאמרה לכתוב Megillah 7a

pretation of those rabbis opinions: 'The story of Esther was composed to be read, but not to be written down'.<sup>81</sup> The latter agreed with their colleagues that 'the compilation of the story of Esther was made by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit',<sup>82</sup> but were unwilling to admit that the Holy Spirit had inspired them to omit the name of God, seeing in this omission a certain faint-heartedness. The other rabbis, however, looked upon it from a different point of view, holding perhaps that the story is the more religious in its spirit, because of its being so entirely free from the phraseology of religion.<sup>83</sup>

Bearing in mind the religious conceptions of Mordecai and Esther, we understand why Sirach did not enumerate them among 'the Fathers of the world'. To any un-

<sup>81</sup> אסתר ברוח הקדש נאמרה *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> See also Stanley, *History*, III, p. 201.

<sup>83</sup> Wildeboer, p. 172, and other commentators conclude from the fact that Sirach did not mention Mordecai and Esther, that their story was unknown in his time. Jampel, however, calls attention to Sirach's omission of Daniel and Ezra. But these omissions do not invalidate the critics' objection. The existence of the historical Daniel cannot be denied, as we have for it the testimony of Ezekiel (28. 3): 'Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel'. But there can be no doubt that the latter was not a contemporary of Ezekiel, as he is represented with Noah and Job as an example of a God-fearing man (14. 14, 20). If he was not a pre-historic personality, he must have lived in the hoary antiquity. The Book that bears his name is no doubt younger than Sirach. As to Ezra, Sirach was not a 'Bible-critic'. In his eyes Ezra was merely the copyist of the Mosaic Law and a holy man, but no more holy than the prophets Haggai, Zachariah, and Malachi, whom he also omitted to mention. Ezra, in Sirach's opinion, was only the leader of about fourteen hundred immigrants and one of the great teachers of the people. But having built neither the Temple nor the walls of Jerusalem, he did not leave a lasting memorial for future generations. Of Nehemiah he could say that he raised the walls of Jerusalem and restored the home of Israel. But Sirach could not have omitted the names of Mordecai and Esther who played such an important part in Jewish history, if he had considered them saints in Israel.

prejudiced mind it must have been obvious that they did not belong in this assemblage. In a later period, however, the Book of Esther having become popular, it would have been blasphemy to criticize the conduct of these saviours of Israel. The rabbis had no other course but to represent them as Jewish saints, and endeavoured to the best of their ability to defend and justify all their actions.

*(To be continued.)*